AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

For the convenience of the Examiner, all claims have been presented whether or not an amendment has been made.

1. **(Currently Amended)** A method for remotely collecting data from a dealer management system, comprising:

identifying a dealer management system ~~that is~~ **communicatively** coupled to a secure data access port, wherein**;**

the secure data access port is ~~also~~ **communicatively** coupled to a public network**;** ~~,~~ and

the dealer management system ~~is coupled to at least one client device and~~ is operable to process ~~dealer initiated transactions~~ **a local request for data, the local request received** from ~~the~~ **at least one of a plurality of local** client ~~device~~ **devices communicatively coupled to the dealer management system**;

receiving at the secure data access port a remote request for data, the remote request received over the public network from a remote system;

transforming the remote request to a serial data stream;

~~remotely connecting to the dealer management system from a remote system using the public network, wherein the remote connection is a public connection established through the secure data access port, and the secure data access port is operable to pass remote transactions received from the remote system to the dealer management system;~~

forwarding ~~a~~ **the transformed** remote **request** ~~transaction from the remote system~~ **from the secure data access port** to the dealer management system, wherein the **transformed** remote ~~transaction includes a~~ request ~~for stored data and is given a priority level~~ **is treated** by the dealer management system ~~that is~~ **as having a** similar ~~to client initiated transactions~~ **level of priority as the local request**; and

receiving at the remote system the requested data from the dealer management system.

2. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, wherein ~~remotely connecting to the dealer management system from a remote system using the public network comprises remotely connecting to the dealer management system using~~ **the public network comprises** the Internet.

3. **(Original)** The method of claim 2, wherein the secure data access port is assigned an IP address, and the remote system connects to the dealer management system using the Internet by entering the IP address of the secure data access port.

4. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim l, wherein the secure data access port ~~includes~~ **is further operable to use a public and private key pair to establish a secure connection between the remote system and the dealer management system.**

~~a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~when initiating the remote connection with the secure data access port, providing a private key that corresponds to a public key previously associated with the secure data access port;~~

~~if the private key corresponds with the public key, the remote system is granted access to the secure data access port, otherwise remote access is denied.~~

5. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to:** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~when initiating the remote connection with the secure data access port, providing an~~ **receive an** IP address ~~of~~ **associated with** the remote system**;**

~~to the secure data access port, wherein the secure data access port is operable to determine~~ if the IP address is **not** an accepted IP address, ~~and if the IP address is determined to be an accepted IP address, the remote system is granted~~ **deny the remote system** access to the secure data access port~~, otherwise remote access is denied~~.

6. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to:** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~when initiating the remote connection with secure data access port, providing~~ **receive** a pass-code ~~to the secure data access port~~ **from the remote system**; and

if the pass-code is ~~determined to be~~ **not** a valid pass-code, ~~the remote system is granted~~ **deny the remote system** access to the secure data access port~~, otherwise remote access is denied~~.

7. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, further comprising:

logging on to the dealer management system by providing a pass-code, wherein the pass-code provides file level access to certain data stored in the dealer management system, and the remote ~~transaction includes~~ **request comprises** a command to directly access data from the dealer management system.

8. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, further comprising:

~~in the secure data access port, transforming the remote transaction into a format that is acceptable for processing by the dealer management; and~~

in the secure data access port, transforming the requested data received from the dealer management system into a format acceptable for transmission over the public network.

9. **(Original)** The method of claim 8, wherein the requested data received from the dealer management system is transformed into data packets acceptable for transmission to the remote system using the TCP/IP protocol in an encrypted format.

10. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 8, wherein **the remote request** ~~the remote transaction received from the remote system~~ is transformed into ~~a~~ **the** serial data stream ~~acceptable for transmission to the dealer management system~~ **by a terminal emulator application executed by the secure data access port**.

11. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, wherein **the secure data access port is logically positioned between the public network and a firewall associated with the dealer management system.** ~~remotely connecting to the dealer management system from a remote system using the public network comprises remotely connecting to the dealer management system using an indirect connection that includes at least one intermediary device logically positioned between the remote system and the secure data access port.~~

12. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, wherein:

the remote request is associated with a pass-code;

the pass-code is usable by the data management system to determine one or more types of data that the remote system is permitted to receive from the dealer management system.

~~the secure data access port includes a board level computer, and the board level computer is operable to allow the remote system to remotely configure the secure data access port.~~

13. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 1, wherein:

the dealer management system is associated with an automobile dealership;

the at least one local client device is associated with one or more employees of the automobile dealership; and

the remote system is associated with a financing service or insurer that provides services to one or more customers of the automobile dealership. ~~identifying a dealer management system that is coupled to a secure data access port comprises identifying an automobile dealership's dealer management system.~~

14. **(Withdrawn)** A method for remotely collecting data from a dealer management system, comprising:

(a) remotely connecting to a dealer management system from a remote system coupled to the dealer management system over a public network, wherein the dealer management system includes stored dealer data;

(b) collecting a current set of data from the stored dealer data;

(c) comparing the current set of data with a previously collected set of data to determine if there are any differences between the sets of data;

(d) if there are differences between the sets of data:

replacing the previously collected set of data with the current set of data; and

updating a database with the identified differences in data, wherein the updated database includes collected data that is a near real-time replica of data stored in the dealer management system.

15. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 14, wherein remotely connecting to a dealer management system from a remote system coupled to the dealer management system over a public network comprises:

identifying a dealer management system that is coupled to a secure data access port, wherein the secure data access port is also coupled to a public network, and the dealer management system is coupled to at least one client device and is operable to process dealer initiated transactions from the client device; and

remotely connecting to the dealer management system from a remote system using the public network, wherein the remote connection is a public connection established through the secure data access port, and the secure data access port is operable to pass remote transactions received from the remote system to the dealer management system.

16. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 15, wherein the secure data access port collects the current set of data and the comparison between the current set of data and the previously collected set of data is performed by the secure data access port, and the secure data access port is operable to forward the identified differences in data to the remote system.

17. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 15, wherein collecting a current set of data from the stored dealer data comprises:

forwarding a remote transaction from the remote system to the dealer management system, wherein the remote transaction includes a request for stored data and is given a priority level by the dealer management system that is similar to client initiated transactions; and

receiving at the remote system the requested data from the dealer management system, wherein the requested data includes a current set of data from the stored dealer data.

18. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 17, further comprising:

in the secure data access port, transforming the remote transaction into a format that is acceptable for processing by the dealer management system, wherein the transformed transaction is in substantially the same format as client initiated transactions; and

in the secure data access port, transforming the requested data received from the dealer management system into a format acceptable for transmission over the public network.

19. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 18, wherein the requested data received from the dealer management system is transformed into data packets acceptable for transmission to the remote system using the TCP/IP protocol in an encrypted format.

20. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 15, wherein remotely connecting to the dealer management system from a remote system using the public network comprises remotely connecting to the dealer management system using the Internet by entering the IP address of the secure data access port.

21. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 15, wherein identifying a dealer management system that is coupled to a secure data access port comprises identifying an automobile dealership's dealer management system.

22. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 14, further comprising:

(e) repeating steps (b) through (d) on an adjustable interval of time that is adjustable to produce a desired resolution of current data stored in the database.

23. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 14, further comprising:

associating a timestamp with the collected current set of data, wherein the updated database includes the associated timestamp.

24. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 14, wherein updating a database with the identified differences in data comprises:

generating an update report that includes the identified differences between the sets of data; and

updating a database with the update report.

25. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 14, wherein the collected data stored in the database includes a plurality of data sets.

26. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 14, further comprising:

logging on to the dealer management system by providing a pass-code, wherein the pass-code provides file level access to certain data stored in the dealer management system, and the current set of data collected from the stored dealer data is directly accessed from the dealer management system.

27. **(Withdrawn)** A method for providing access to dealer data stored in a dealer management system, comprising:

entering into a service agreement with a customer interested in access to current dealer data;

arranging for the dealer data to be remotely collected from the dealer management system and stored in a remote facility using a public network; and

permitting the customer to access the remote facility to retrieve the stored dealer data.

28. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 27, wherein arranging for the dealer data to be remotely collected and stored in a remote facility using a public network comprises contracting with an operator of a data-warehouse to collect and store the dealer data from the dealer management system.

29. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 27, wherein arranging for the dealer data to be remotely collected and stored in a remote facility using a public network comprises configuring a remote system that is operable to:

(a) remotely connect to the dealer management system over a public network;

(b) collect a current set of data from the stored dealer data;

(c) compare the current set of data with a previously collected set of data to determine if there are any differences between the sets of data; and

(d) if there are differences between the sets of data:

replace the previously collected set of data with the current set of data; and

update a database with the identified differences in data, wherein the updated database includes collected data that is a near real-time replica of data stored in the dealer management system.

30. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 29, further comprising:

(e) repeat steps (b) through (d) on an adjustable interval of time that is adjustable to produce a desired resolution of current data stored in the database.

31. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 29, further comprising:

associating a timestamp with the collected current set of data, wherein the updated database includes the associated timestamp.

32. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 29, wherein the remote system remotely connects to the dealer management system over the public network by:

identifying a dealer management system that is coupled to a secure data access port, wherein the secure data access port is also coupled to the public network, and the dealer management system is coupled to at least one client device and is operable to process dealer initiated transactions from the client device; and

establishing a remote connection with the dealer management system, wherein the remote connection is a public connection established through the secure data access port, and the secure data access port is operable to pass remote transactions received from the remote system to the dealer management system.

33. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 32, wherein identifying a dealer management system that is coupled to a secure data access port comprises identifying an automobile dealership's dealer management system.

34. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 32, wherein the remote system collects a current set of data from the stored dealer data by:

forwarding a remote transaction from the remote system to the dealer management system, wherein the remote transaction includes a request for stored data and is given a priority level by the dealer management system that is similar to client initiated transactions; and

receiving at the remote system the requested data from the dealer management system, wherein the requested data includes the current set of data from the stored dealer data.

35. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 27, wherein the service agreement includes terms directed to the collection and availability of dealer data.

36. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 35, wherein the service agreement includes a collection interval for the dealer data, wherein the collection interval determines a data resolution for the collected data stored in the remote facility.

37. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 35, wherein the service agreement guarantees a minimum up-time that the customer is guaranteed access to the remote facility.

38. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 27, further comprising:

ensuring that the dealer data is made available to the customer at the agreed upon terms.

39. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 27, wherein arranging for the dealer data to be remotely collected and stored in a remote facility using a public network comprises configuring a remote system that is operable to:

(a) remotely connect to the dealer management system over a public network;

(b) collect a current set of data from the stored dealer data; and

(c) over-right an existing set of data stored in the remote facility with the current set of data.

40. **(Withdrawn)** The method of claim 39, further comprising:

(d) associating a timestamp with the collected current set of data, wherein the timestamp is retrievable from the remote facility to determine when the current set of data was last collected.

41. **(Currently Amended)** A system to facilitate the remote collection of data, comprising:

a secure data access port coupled to a public network and a dealer management system, wherein:

the dealer management system ~~includes at least one client device and~~ is operable to process **a local request for data, the local request received** ~~dealer initiated transactions~~ from ~~the~~ **at least one of a plurality of local** client ~~device,~~ **devices communicatively coupled to the dealer management system; and** ~~wherein~~

the secure data access port is ~~cooperatively~~ operable ~~with the dealer management system~~ to:

~~accept a remote connection from a remote system, wherein the remote connection is a public connection established with the secure data access port, and the secure data access port is operable to pass remote transactions received from the remote system to the dealer management system;~~

receive a remote ~~transaction~~ **request for data, the remote request received over the public network** from ~~the~~ **a** remote system;

transform the remote request into a serial data stream; ~~and~~

forward the **transformed** remote ~~transaction~~ **request** to the dealer management system, wherein the **transformed** remote ~~transaction includes a~~ request ~~for stored data and is given a priority level~~ **is treated** by the dealer management system ~~that is~~ **as having a** similar ~~to client initiated transactions~~ **level of priority as the local request**; and

forward the requested data received from the dealer management system to the remote system.

42. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 41, wherein the secure data access port ~~includes~~ **comprises** a board level computer, and the board level computer is operable to allow a remote system to remotely configure the secure data access port.

43. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 41, wherein the public network is the Internet and the secure data access port is assigned an IP address, and the remote **system establishes a** connection **with** ~~between the remote system and~~ the secure data access port ~~is established~~ by entering the IP address of the secure data access port.

44. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 41, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to use a public and private key pair to establish a secure connection between the remote system and the dealer management system.** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~before accepting the remote connection, receiving a private key from the remote system; and~~

~~if the private key corresponds with a public key previously associated with the secure data access port, accepting the remote connection, otherwise the connection is denied.~~

45. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 41, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to:** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~before accepting the remote connection, accepting~~ **receive** an IP address ~~of~~ **associated with** the remote system; **and**

if the IP address ~~corresponds with~~ **is not** an accepted IP address, ~~accepting~~ **deny the remote system access to the secure data access port** ~~the remote connection, otherwise the connection is denied~~.

46. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 41, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to:** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~before accepting the remote connection, receiving~~ **receive** a pass-code from the remote system; and

if the pass-code is ~~determined to be~~ **not** a valid pass-code, ~~accepting~~ **deny** the remote ~~connection, otherwise the connection is denied~~ **system access to the secure data access port**.

47. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 41, wherein ~~the secure data access port is operable to~~:

the transformed remote request is in ~~transform the remote transaction into~~ a format that is acceptable for processing by the dealer management system; and

the secure data access port is further operable to transform the requested data received from the dealer management system into a format acceptable for transmission over the public network.

48. **(Original)** The system of claim 47, wherein the requested data received from the dealer management system is transformed into data packets acceptable for transmission to the remote system using the TCP/IP protocol.

49. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 47, wherein the remote ~~transaction received from the remote system~~ **request** is transformed into ~~a~~ **the** serial data stream ~~acceptable for transmission to the dealer management system~~ **by a terminal emulator application executed by the secure data access port**.

50. **(Original)** The system of claim 41, wherein the secure data access port is coupled to a client device, and the secure data access port is operable to provide pass-through connectivity to the dealer management system for the client device, and the pass-through connectivity occurs transparent to the client device.

51. **(Currently Amended)** A system to facilitate the remote collection of data, comprising:

a dealer management system **operable to process a local request for data, the local request received from at least one of a plurality of local client devices communicatively coupled to the dealer management system**; and

a secure data access port **communicatively** coupled to a public network and ~~a~~ **the** dealer management system, wherein the ~~dealer management system includes at least one client device and is operable to process dealer initiated transactions from the client device, wherein the~~ secure data access port is ~~cooperatively~~ operable ~~with the dealer management system~~ to:

~~accept a remote connection from a remote system, wherein the remote connection is established with the secure data access port, and the secure data access port is operable to pass remote transactions received from the remote system to the dealer management system;~~

receive a remote **request for data, the remote request received over the public network from a** ~~transaction from the~~ remote system**;**

transform the remote request to a serial data stream;

~~and~~ forward the **transformed** remote ~~transaction~~ **request** to the dealer management system, wherein the **transformed** remote ~~transaction includes a~~ request ~~for stored data and is given a priority level~~ **is treated** by the dealer management system **as having a similar level of priority as the local request** ~~that is similar to client initiated transactions~~; and

forward the requested data received from the dealer management system to the remote system.

52. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 51, wherein the secure data access port ~~includes~~ **comprises** a board level computer, and the board level computer is operable to allow a remote system to remotely configure the secure data access port.

53. **(Original)** The system of claim 51, wherein the dealer management system is an automobile dealership's dealer management system.

54. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 51, wherein**:**

the public network ~~is~~ **comprises** the Internet**;** ~~and~~

the secure data access port is assigned an IP address**;** and

the remote **system establishes a** connection ~~between the remote system and~~ **with** the secure data access port ~~is established~~ by entering the IP address of the secure data access port.

55. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 51, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to use a public and private key pair to establish a secure connection between the remote system and the dealer management system.** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~before accepting the remote connection, receiving a private key from the remote system; and~~

~~if the private key corresponds with a public key previously associated with the secure data access port, accepting the remote connection, otherwise the connection is denied.~~

56. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 51, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to:** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~before accepting the remote connection, accepting~~ **receive** an IP address ~~of~~ **associated with** the remote system; **and**

if the IP address ~~corresponds with~~ **is not** an accepted IP address, ~~accepting the remote connection, otherwise the connection is denied~~ **deny the remote system access to the secure data access port**.

57. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 51, wherein the secure data access port **is further operable to:** ~~includes a security module that is operable to execute a security protocol that restricts access to the secure data access port, wherein the security protocol includes:~~

~~before accepting the remote connection, receiving~~ **receive** a pass-code from the remote system; and

if the pass-code is ~~determined to be~~ **not** a valid pass-code, ~~accepting~~ **deny** the remote ~~connection, otherwise the connection is denied~~ **system access to the secure data access port**.

58. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 51, wherein ~~the secure data access port is operable to~~:

the transformed remote request is in ~~transform the remote transaction into~~ a format that is acceptable for processing by the dealer management system; and

the secure data access port is further operable to transform the requested data received from the dealer management system into a format acceptable for transmission over the public network.

59. **(Original)** The system of claim 58, wherein the requested data received from the dealer management system is transformed into data packets acceptable for transmission to the remote system using the TCP/IP protocol.

60. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 58, wherein the remote ~~transaction received from the remote system~~ **request** is transformed into ~~a~~ **the** serial data stream ~~acceptable for transmission to the dealer management system~~ **by a terminal emulator application executed by the secure data access port**.

61. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising establishing a remote connection, via the secure data access port, between the remote system and the dealer management system, wherein the remote connection allows the remote system substantially continuous access to data stored in the dealer management system.

62. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, wherein:

the dealer management system comprises a plurality of client communication links; and

the secure data access port is communicatively coupled to the dealer management system via at least one of the plurality of client communication links.

63. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, wherein:

the secure data access port is communicatively coupled to a particular local client device; and

the secure data access port provides a pass-through connection for data transmissions between the local client device and the dealer management system.

64. **(New)** The method of Claim 6, wherein the pass-code comprises a user identifier and a password.

65. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the remote system is operable, via the secure data access port, to write data to a database associated with the dealer management system.

66. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, wherein:

the remote request comprises a request for a particular type of data; and

the secure data access port comprises a data aggregation module that is operable to, according to configurable time intervals, repeatedly retrieve the particular type of data from the dealer management system.

67. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the requested data from the dealer management system comprises at least one of:

customer data;

inventory data;

warranty data; and

sales data.